August 26, 2024 | The Jerusalem Post

Hezbollah's plodding war of attrition on Israel will continue – this is how

Hezbollah doesn't mind waiting for weeks or months to attack because it knows this puts Israel and the US on alert.

Seth J. Frantzman

Adjunct Fellow

Listen to analysis

5 min

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah delivered a speech on Sunday about the Iranian-backed terrorist group's attack on Israel earlier in the day. The attack was named "**Operation Arbaeen Day**" because it coincided with the end of a Shi'ite religious period called Arbaeen, he said.

Hezbollah carried out the large attack on Israel to avenge the killing of **Fuad Shukr**, one of its senior commanders. Shukr was killed because of Hezbollah's attack on Majdal Shams in July, which killed 12 children and teenagers.

Nasrallah's latest speech attempted to justify the attack and Hezbollah's failure to achieve much by carrying it out. "We have enough time to negotiate because the goal of this front and its sacrifices is to stop the war against Gaza," he said.

In essence, Hezbollah does not see any of these attacks as urgent; instead, it prefers a long plodding war of attrition with Israel. Hezbollah has lost more than 430 of its fighters since it began its attacks last October, but it appears unfazed.

Nasrallah sketched out some of Hezbollah's decision-making in his speech. Hezbollah had acted alone, rather than coordinating a multifront attack with Iran and other proxies, he said. Hezbollah had decided not to target infrastructure and civilians; instead, it focused its attacks on IDF military sites, he added, citing an Israeli base at Glilot. Nevertheless, Hezbollah did not succeed in this attack.

While the IDF said it had stopped 90% of Hezbollah's attack via a preemptive strike, Hezbollah claimed it still fired 340 Katyusha rockets. It also launched drones from the Bekaa Valley, Nasrallah claimed.

According to Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Iran's state media, "Nasrallah also stated that the truth of what happened in these operations will be known, despite the enemy's secrecy, and that data shows a number of drones hit their targets, but the enemy has remained silent."

Hezbollah's propaganda, as voiced by its leader, claimed that all its plans were achieved.

"What the enemy bombarded today were empty valleys; therefore, the enemy's claims of targeting ballistic missiles that were prepared to target Tel Aviv are baseless, and the launch pads of combat drones were not hit, and the Israeli attacks hit only two missile launchers," IRNA reported, citing Nasrallah's speech, which mentioned ballistic missiles and precision weapons.

Hezbollah is trying to save face. It knows Israel has claimed a major success in preempting its attacks, and that the IDF says it destroyed thousands of Hezbollah rocket launchers. Hezbollah wants to pretend that it emerged unscathed. This is the typical dance that Hezbollah has been doing for 10 months.

"Nasrallah said that we announced that our response today is preliminary," IRNA reported.

War of attrition

In essence, what Hezbollah is saying is that its plodding attacks will continue, and this war of attrition will continue. Hezbollah will continue to attack until there is a ceasefire in Gaza. Then it will revisit its demands, and it may even continue attacks after that due to the "open account" it believes it has due to the killing of Shukr.

But it is clear that Hezbollah prefers to return to some semblance of quiet. It doesn't want a large war. It also thinks that it benefits from this low-level war. It is putting on a brave face in a sense, despite its losses. It is showing that it can take the losses of a few men a week in this long war, and that it will recover.

It is also indicating that it doesn't view any of this with urgency. It doesn't mind waiting for weeks or months to attack because it knows this puts Israel and the US on alert. Hezbollah believes it has achieved a lot just because it can put Israel on alert, and that in some cases, this might be enough for it to achieve a kind of victory. It has also caused Israel to evacuate the northern border, which for Hezbollah is a major accomplishment.

Nasrallah's speech revealed the overall sense that Hezbollah has that it doesn't need to carry out more large attacks quickly. It can wait, and it will wait as Iran keys in other proxies, such as Syrian-based militias. One of those groups launched a drone at Israel, for instance. Yemen's **Houthis** have also backed the Hezbollah attack, according to a statement at Beirut-based Al Mayadeen, a pro-Iranian news channel.

Meanwhile, the Iranian regime is also signaling that it can hold off on its own claims it will retaliate against Israel. Iran's foreign minister spoke with his Italian counterpart on Monday. "Iran's foreign minister has reiterated his country's pledge to punish the Zionist regime for assassinating Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran," IRNA reported.

Iran is also reaching out to Turkey and Egypt. "Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and his Egyptian counterpart, Badr Abdelatty, have discussed bilateral relations and regional issues, including the Gaza war," IRNA reported Sunday.

Seth Frantzman is the author of The October 7 War: Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza (2024) and an adjunct fellow at The Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Topics: AL MAYADEENARBA'INBADR ABDELATTYBEIRUTBEQAA VALLEYEGYPTFUAD SHUKRGAZA STRIPHAMASHASSAN NASRALLAH

Show More